

City of Lakeland
Natural Resources Department
Preservation vs. Conservation

In any conversation, getting one's point across can hinge on the definition of just one word. The misunderstanding of one word can lead to a string of problems, misinterpretation of one's stance or beliefs, and could turn peaceful discussions into arguments and legal jargon. The terms conservation and preservation are no different.

Preservation is the setting aside of land to stay in its current condition to protect the area from negative human influence. The very definition raises questions for implementation. How does one "preserve" a dynamic resource? Forests and forested ecosystems are constantly changing. To our department the answer is that the entire system can be preserved such that natural dynamics are allowed to continue. Unfortunately, the ethic of infinite supply during the 19th and 20th centuries has left our Southern society with little area of this nature.

Conservation is the human management of land so as to eliminate waste and maximize efficiency of use while yielding the highest sustainable benefit to present generations (citizens), and maintaining the resource in such a state that it can provide for the benefit of future generations. Because of past land use activities, the majority of Lakeland's forests are in dire need of forest management and forest health monitoring. Lakeland's forests are inundated by vines and non-native invasive plant pests. Both of these play a major role in forest health, fire fuels, and most importantly biodiversity. While mismanagement of forest operations has been in the forefront of public perception for the majority of the 20th century, the "no management" option has quickly become identified as a major problem mounting in the Nation's woodlands in the 21st.

So where does Lakeland fall in the debate over conservation versus preservation? Based on our department's Natural Resources Inventory and public input, we feel that the City strikes a very reasonable balance between the two. In other words, the citizens have advocated for the preservation of some resources while encouraging the City as a whole be developed under strong conservation principles. While meeting these goals is a continual and evolving process, our department and all of City staff strives to meet these challenges in a variety of ways. Our department has focused on implementing a variety of natural resources management regulations.

In fact, through the development and implementation of the City's tree and stream management regulations, Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment, and future public land management plans the City of Lakeland's Natural Resources Department has become one of the state's most progressive and acknowledged program for urban and community forestry. Through a conservation ethic the Department is working to protect, either through conservation or preservation, highly valued natural resources within the city, that were identified by the inventory and that are being defined by the assessment (based on citizen input). While we realize that not all resources can be protected we strive to raise the level of debate such that with every development decision, tradeoffs can be weighed and informed land use decisions can be made.

Our department is committed to providing the citizens with a quality environment and frequently falls back on motivational quotes like that below.

"The object of government is the welfare of the people." "Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us" **Theodore Roosevelt** (August 31, 1910).